

[East Valley Tribune](#)

Paul Giblin

Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., and a bipartisan group of representatives introduced legislation to create an updated GI Bill, which would provide military veterans with educational benefits ranging from college tuition to living stipends.

In all, more than 170 members of the House have signed on as co-sponsors of the legislation, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, which was introduced Wednesday night.

The benefits would be available to all veterans serving since Sept. 11, 2001, through the end of the current campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The measure is long overdue, Mitchell said.

"It's very, very important, because the GI Bill we have now is based on peacetime involvement," he said.

Mitchell has asked House Democratic leadership to include the legislation as part of an emergency war supplemental package expected be considered during the next several weeks, according to his office.

A companion bill was introduced in the Senate last month by Sens. Jim Webb, D-Va., Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., and others.

A key aspect of the measure is its provision for full tuition at public universities and increased payments at private universities, said Mitchell, the bill's lead House sponsor.

The legislation also eases some time limits imposed by the current military benefits package, and provides additional money for living expenses.

"This is just really an enhanced and robust benefit that the military doesn't have now," Mitchell said Thursday.

The measure is important because it will help attract young men and women into military service, and later ease their transition out of military service, he said.

"Offering these soldiers a chance to go back to school, where they don't have to worry about the cost of tuition, and they get a living stipend, will help them get back into civilian life," said Mitchell, who represents Arizona's 5th Congressional District.

The measure is projected to cost between \$2.4 billion and \$4 billion annually.

Yet, any money spent to provide benefits is expected to be returned many times over through payroll taxes by the same veterans who use the initial benefits, Mitchell said.

The Associated Press reported Monday that Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, is concerned benefits could be so attractive they would hurt the military's retention rate as enlisted personnel opt for school rather than continued military service.

Akaka is chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

Mitchell said that the number of co-sponsors in both the House and Senate illustrates strong support for the measure.

Mitchell Backs Beefed-up GI Bill for Vets

Thursday, 10 April 2008

More than 50 senators signed on to sponsor the Senate measure.